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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the differences in language usage between males and females in the specific moral domain of conflict resolution and rationales for decisions. The subjects, 39 female and 21 male college students, were given an imaginary conflict scenario to resolve, asked how the conflict should be resolved, what the rationales were for their choices, and, assuming the roles of the two characters in the scenario, asked what were the central concerns of the two characters involved. It was hypothesized that two different languages would emerge in the rationales for the solutions to the problems in the scenario: women's choices would be defended in language referring to the relationships described in the scenario, while men's choices would be explained with a language indicative of a justice approach based on rights and rules. The data, coded and analyzed by chi square, revealed that there was no significant difference in response to the decision one character should have made or in the use of justice or interpersonal themes. However, a significant difference was found when subjects were asked to put themselves in the positions of both characters in the scenario and state the concerns of each character. Rather than attributing these differences to biological sex, the study indicates that they may be related to positions of power or status. (DF)

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Language Utilized in Rationalizing Conflict Decisions: Is There a Different Voice?

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Language Utilized in Rationalizing Conflict Decisions: Is There a Different Voice?

Much social science research attention in the past has focused on male/female differences. Specifically in the field of communication, long lists of variables have been examined with regard to their differential employment by males and females.

Several studies have been conducted which look at differences between male and female approaches to conflict management. The results of these studies have been ambiguous, including the following findings: women tend to use more accomodation strategies (Frost and Wilmot, 1978); learn to avoid conflict situations (Bardwick, 1971); learn to use more expressions of support and solidarity (Strodtbeck and Mann, 1956); use more facilitative behaviors (Zimmerman and West, 1975) than males do. However, in a review of the literature on conflict behavior, Terhune (1970) observed women appear to be more accomodative than men in some experimental situations, but less cooperative in others.

Males have been found to use more verbal aggression (Sears, Maccoby, and Levin, 1957), and to be more dominant in conversations (Zimmerman and West, 1975). Parsons and Bales (1955) suggest that men are more instrumental (concerned with tasks) and women are more expressive (concerned with emotions). However, Raush, Barry, Hertel, and Swain,

1974) found virtually no significant differences in the ways in which men and women communicate and deal with conflict. They also found newlywed husbands engaging in a high degree of supportive and expressive acts. In fact, Raush et al. (1974) conclude that Parsons and Bales' (1955) distinction between female (expressive) and male (instrumental) behavior is essentially useless for analyzing marital conflict behavior.

This equivocal set of findings is not restricted to research on conflict management alone. For example, self-disclosure research has indicated both that females engage in more self-disclosure than males (cf. Jourard and Lasakow, 1958; Morgan, 1976; Pedersen and Higbee, 1969; Rivenback, 1971) and that there is no difference between male and female disclosure patterns (cf. Certner, 1973; Ricker-Ousiankina, and Kusmin, 1958; Weigel, Weigel, and Chadwick, 1969). These findings are further complicated by Chelune's (1976) observation that observers consistently overestimate the amount of males' sef-disclosure while underestimating the amount of females' self-disclosure behavior.

In studies examining verbosity a similar problem exists. Some research has found females to be more verbose than males (cf. Konsky, 1978; Mabry, 1976). Some research has yielded the opposite finding (Swacker, 1975), and still other research has failed to isolate verbosity effects (Brouwer, Gernitsen, and Dellaan, 1979; Martin and Craig, 1980).

In response to these mixed findings, many researchers concluded as did Greenblatt, Hasenauer, and Freimuth (1980) that :

> the use of biological sex as an antecedent variable is problematic . . . because it collapses all individual sex-role identities into one or the other exclusive categories male and female (p. 117).

Researchers began considering the possibility that merely looking at anatomical sex is insufficient as a predictive variable. For, in addition to the biological given of anatomical sex, individuals also acquire, through social interactions, psychological sex. Interest in psychological sex-type spawned numerous instruments which purport to measure it (Bem, 1974; Berzins, Welling, and Wetter, 1978; Heilbrun, 1976; Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp, 1975).

With the advent of the construct of psychological sex-type, and the operationalization of it, came a flood of studies demonstrating relationships between androgyny and other variables (cf. Baggio and Neilson, 1976; Bem, 1975, 1976; Greenblatt et al 1980; Montgomery and Burgoon, 1977; Pearson, 1981).

However, after initial enthusiasm concerning the predictive power of psychological sex-type, several critiques have pointed to troubling issues in relation to the conceptual validity of the construct. Lott, Spence, and Helmreich, (1979) note that conceptually androgyny relies on an a priori definition of masculinity and femininity. They contend that this reinforces verbal habits which emphasize mascu-

linity and femininity as two categories and thus contradict the essence of the androgyny construct. As Putnam (1982) observes:

> Our reliance on sex-stereotypic traits to define androgyny locks us into the very dilemma we seek to escape. By measuring masculinity versus femininity and using statistical tests of difference to uncover sex differences, we often perpetuate the inequities of the status quo by arguing tautologically for dualism (p. 2).

Additionally, the psychometric adequacy of the instruments purporting to measure psychological sex-type poses a problem to the researcher. Analyses of the factor structure of the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, and Heilbrun's Masculinity and Femininity Scales (cf. Gaudreau, 1977; Gross, Batlis, Small, and Erdwins, 1979; Pearson, 1980) have yielded a variety of different results. The emergence of more than two factors in most of these studies suggests a more complex situation than that invited by the masculine-feminine dichotomy and calls nto question the psychometric adequacy of the instruments.

Thus gender research using biological sex yields contradictory findings and gender research based on psychological sex-type is plagued with problems of validity. Additionally, regardless of which approach one takes to the independent variable, gender research has been criticized for its atheoretical nature. Konsky and Murdock (1982) point out that most variables in gender based language research are chosen largely on the basis of previous research without regard to theory. And Putnam (1982) notes, that:

> theorizing about male-female communications is . . . limited by our status as a disconnected array of investigators unified by the use of one variable, gender (p. 3).

Many researchers believe that the lack of theoretical grounding ultimately renders sex related research insignificant. Kramarae (1981) observes that we have theoretical analyses available to us that would be useful as a "quilting pattern" to organize contradictory results and guide future directions in gender research.

Finally, researchers have been concerned by an evaluative bias in gender research that affects females negatively both by devaluing female characteristics and by establishing the male characteristics as the norm. In a study exploring the premise that the masculine stereotype is the more rewarded in our culture, Roskenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, Inge, and Broverman (1968) found that more stereotypically masculine traits than feminine traits were rated as socially desirable by college students of both sexes. Gilligan (1982) notes that it is difficult to say "different" without connoting "better" or "worse."

Kramarae (1981), in offering the muted group theory as explanatory of male/female language differences, says that "females are "inarticulate' because the language they use is derivative, having been developed largely out of male perception of reality" (p. 2). In psychology, McClelland (1975) observes that the tendency is to regard male behavior as the norm and female behavior as a deviation.

Taken together, these problem areas pose serious obstacles to proceeding with gender research in the future under the same assumptions as in the past. Several researchers (cf. Gilligan, 1982; Kramarae, 1981; Putnam, 1982) have suggested new directions for gender research. In an influential recent publication, Gilligan (1982) theorizes that women's moral domain is informed by an interpersonal logic while men's moral domain develops from a justice approach derived from the formal logic of fairness. These two separate approaches are expressed in two different "voices" and point toward different understandings of morality.

To develop her theory, Gilligan conducted studies of (1) elementary school children, (2) college students, and (3) women considering an abortion. Gilligan's methodology involves analyzing subjects' responses generated during open-ended interviews. In each study, subjects were presented one of Kohlberg's (1969) well-known dilemmas designed to measure the stages of moral development. Particularly striking results were obtained in the study where children were told Kohlberg's (1969) "Heinz" story about a man who cannot afford to pay for a drug to save his dying wife. Gilligan (1982) reports that boys often see the story in terms of the man's individual moral choice, and conclude that the man should choose life over property and steal the drug. On the other hand, girls often take an over-

view: they wonder what will happen to the relationship if the man gets caught and goes to jail, or they focus on the morality of the druggist, seeing the problem as one of communication--persuading the druggist to do the right thing.

Although the approaches to the problem are simply different, Gilligan (1982) states that in the past the girls' responses have been considered wrong. Further, according to Kohlberg's (1969) scale, girls appear to be deficient in moral development, since their judgments exemplify the third stage of Kohlberg's six-stage sequence. At this stage morality is conceived in interpersonal terms and goodness is equated with helping and pleasing others. A primary objective of a Stage 3 respondent is to be thought of as a "nice" person. Kohlberg and Kramer (1969) imply that mature women function well at this stage of moral development insofar as their lives take place in the home. Kohlberg and Kramer further suggest that only if women enter traditional areas of male activity will they recognize the inadequacy of this "good girl" orientation and progress like men to higher stages where relationships are subordinated to rules (stage four) and rules to universal principles of justice (stages five and six).

Gilligen (1982) stresses that her theory discusses the differential access of the genders to certain kinds of understanding, not the superiority of one gender over the other. Thus in Heinz's dilemma, boys and girls see two very

different moral problems--the boys a conflict between life and property that can be resolved by logical deduction, the girls "a fracture of human relationship that must be mended with its own thread" (p. 31). By asking different questions arising from different conceptions of morality, the children arrive at fundamentally divergent answers. Gilligan states that arranging these answers according to Kohlberg's (1969) invariant successive stages of moral development misses the truths revealed by girls, since the stages are "calibrated" by the logic of boys' responses. According to Gilligan, Kohlberg's theory can answer the question, "What does he see that she does not?" but has nothing to say to the question, "What does she see that he does not?" In Gilligan's view, then, the contrasting images of a hierarchical logic of justice and an interpersonal network of relationships illustrate two views of morality which are "complementary rather than sequential or opposed" (p. 33).

The present study is an attempt to test the validity of Gilligan's theory in the specific moral domain of conflict resolution and rationales for decisions. Subjects were given an imaginary conflict scenario to resolve, and it was hypothesized that two different languages would emerge in the rationales for the solutions to the problem. Women's choices would be defended in language referring to the relationships described in the scenario, while men's choices would be explained with a language indicative of a

justice approach based on rights and rules.

Methods

Subjects and Procedures--Subjects were 60 undergraduates (39 females, 21 males) at a private midwestern university enrolled in a sophomore-level communication class. The subjects were given the following scenario and asked how the conflict should be resolved, what were the rationales for their choices, and, assuming the role of Smith and Jones, what were the central concerns of each of the two characters involved.

> Jones is the supervisor of a large division of the XYZ Company located in Chicago. Fifty people work under Jones' direct supervision. The business is seasonal, and right now is the busy season. Additionally, there has been a flu epidemic, and many of the employees in Jones' division are currently out due to illness. Jones' bosses are concerned that production doesn't fall off and are sending messages to that effect.
>
> Smith is an employee supervised by Jones. Smith has worked for XYZ Company for five years and has a responsible position within the division. It is important for Smith to be at the office to get work accomplished. Smith has been gone for the regularly scheduled two week vacation and has just returned to work. Smith has been back at work for only two days when a message from the Smith family arrives saying that Smith's brother is planning to be married in Seattle. The wedding is unexpected, but the Smith family is very close, and it is important for everyone that Smith be there.
>
> Smith has found this out on a Wednesday. The wedding is scheduled for the following Monday. In order for Smith to attend the wedding and travel back and forth from Chicago to Seattle, Smith will have to miss work at least on Monday and Tuesday.

Analysis--The data were coded by two independent coders, trained during a two-hour session. The coders performed a content analysis on the conflict-resolution rationales, using the theme as the recording unit. As Holsti (1969) points out:

> for many purposes the theme, a single assertion about some subject, is the most useful unit of content analysis. It is almost indispensable in research on . . . values, attitudes, beliefs, and the like (p. 116).

The conflict-resolution themes were classified as reflecting either justice or interpersonal concerns, to parallel Gilligan's (1982) analysis. In addition, the concerns of both Smith and Jones were classified as either justice or interpersonal. To correct for chance agreement by the coders, Cohen's (1960) statistic Kappa, which is the proportion of agreement after chance agreement has been removed from consideration, was utilized. After this correction, intercoder reliability was .93. The coders reached 100% agreement on unitizing the data. The coded data were analyzed by the chi square test to determine differences.

Results

Analysis of the data by chi square revealed that there was no significant difference between men and women in this sample as to the decision whether or not Smith should attend the wedding ($\chi^2_{obs} = .563$; $\chi^2_{crit} = 3.84$; $p > .05$). There was no significance difference between males and females in the use of justice or interpersonal themes ($\chi^2_{obs} = 2.45$; $\chi^2_{crit} = 3.84$; $p > .05$), a finding in opposition to the

hypothesis. However, a significant difference was found when subjects were asked to put themselves in the position of both Smith and Jones and state the concerns of each character. Regardless of gender, Smith was described as having interpersonal concerns, while Jones was concerned with justice ($\chi^2_{obs} = 31.9$; $\chi^2_{crit} = 3.84$; $p < .001$). The same results were obtained when results for males and females were analyzed separately. Although the number of concerns listed varied, a t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between males and females in the number of concerns cited ($t = .72$; $p > .05$).

Discussion

We undertook this research in order to examine the power and generalizability of Gilligan's (1982) theory. Our results yielded partial support for two separate voices relative to moral decision-making. It was relatively simple for coders to classify all samples into one of the two categories--justice or interpersonal. Further, there were no unclassifiable items, and few that challenged the mutual exclusivity of the categories.

However, in the present study, although two voices emerged, they were not related to the biological sex of the speaker. Gilligan notes that the association of the interpersonal voice with women is based on her empirical observations. This study supports the existence of two different outlooks, but does not support their identification by the

gender of the speaker. When subjects were asked how they, personally, would resolve the conflict in the situation presented to them, there was no significant difference between the genders as to which type of reasoning (justice or interpersonal) informed their choices.

Rather than suggesting that these two voices, or systems of moral reasoning, are related to biological sex, the results of this study indicate that they may be related to positions of power or status. When subjects took the role of the employee, both males and females significantly attributed interpersonal reasoning to Smith, as opposed to reasoning based on justice. For example, concerns expressed included: "to be loyal to the family, show support and care of brother and family;" "concern for keeping good rapport with employer and fellow employees;" "not losing friendship or respect from boss." However, when role-playing the employer, subjects of both genders couched their concerns in justice terms, significantly more often than in interpersonal terms. For example, "keep workers on and make work their first priority;" "maintaining employee respect for my authority;" "being fair and a good manager;" "that I'm fair to my company (superiors) but also to my employees (inferiors);" were among the concerns expressed when subjects took the role of Jones.

Interestingly, a further finding suggests that biological sex had little effect when subjects imagined themselves

as Smith and Jones. Although the scenario was worded without specifying the gender of the two characters, 41 out of the 60 respondents construed both the employeee and the employer as male. That the subjects were not using "he" in the generic sense was indicated by such comments as: "He should send his wife and/or kids;" and "Maybe he has to be best man at the wedding."

Although the results seem at odds with Gilligan's (1982) assertions, it is interesting to note that subjects preferred a woman's voice (in Gilligan's terms) for the character with lower status in the scenario. This finding concurs with the work by other researchers (e.g., Kramarae, 1981) which posits that women's speech is devalued. Relative to this, Gilligan suggests that the hierarchical notions of Kohlberg (1969) which put women at a disadvantage by using men as the standard punish women for not conforming to this standard. This study supports the notion that the interpersonal voice may not be as powerful as the justice voice, at least in the minds of our subjects.

Any study's findings are limited by the methodology employed. In this study, the use of a hypothetical situation and a pen and paper self-report may make the results less robust than those from a more naturalistic setting. However, Gilligan (1982) did not observe "natural" behavior, but recorded interview responses and also used a hypothetical scenario as part of the interview. Gilligan did obtain

samples representing a wide cross-section of the population, and the present study may be limited by reliance on the traditional subject of social science research, the college sophomore. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the presence of reasoning framed with regard to relationships ("keeping good relations with boss") as opposed to choices informed by a rules approach ("the family isn't paying his salary") seems to emerge clearly in this sample. This is an early attempt to empirically test Gilligan's theoretical position. Further research, possibly in more naturalistic settings where "real" behavior can be observed seems certainly worthy of the effort. Gilligan's basic assumption is that the way people talk about their lives is of crucial importance. The contrasts between the two voices reveal different patterns of thought and ways of seeing the world. How these voices interact within each gender promises to be a fruitful research area, one example of the heuristic potential of Gilligan's work.

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